



May 4, 2018

VIA UPS

Honorable Rebecca Beach Smith
Chief Judge
Walter E. Hoffman United States Courthouse
600 Granby Street
Norfolk, Virginia 23510

Dear Judge Smith:

I write to ask that the Court enable Really Simple Syndication (“RSS”) feeds from its Case Management/Electronic Case Files (“CM/ECF”) system.

RSS feeds are a common tool for disseminating up-to-date information on the internet. People use them to see the latest news headlines, to find the latest episodes of their favorite podcasts, or to track new opinions from federal appellate courts without having to browse for that information on a website.¹

District Court RSS feeds are a singularly important public resource. RSS feeds from CM/ECF provide a regularly-updated catalogue of the latest public filings in civil and criminal cases in a district, in a machine readable format. They typically include the title and docket number of a case, the type of filing, and a link that can be used to retrieve (typically for a fee) the relevant document. At least 74 U.S. District Courts offer at least some access to information about new civil or criminal filings via CM/ECF RSS feeds. The Eastern District of Virginia does not.

As you might imagine, these feeds have proved to be an invaluable tool for informing the public about the work of the federal courts. Journalists and others use them to identify

¹ For example, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals provides RSS feeds for its latest opinions, calendars and arguments. See <http://www.ca4.uscourts.gov/rss-feeds>.

new filings in high-profile litigation. RSS feeds also make it vastly easier to share original documents with members of the public. For example, USA TODAY uses courts' RSS feeds to automatically purchase and make public copies of filings in high-profile District Court cases. *See* https://twitter.com/big_cases. We believe this practice provides important transparency and plays an important role in educating the public about the work of the federal courts by allowing people to see for themselves how it works (or how it doesn't). This is particularly vital in districts like the Eastern District of Virginia, which is often the venue for litigation of national consequence.

Currently, the Eastern District of Virginia does not provide an RSS feed from its CM/ECF system. It is my understanding that this was a choice the Court made, and that its CM/ECF system would support that function if the Court elected to use it.

I hope you will consider doing so.

I would be happy to discuss this request with you or your staff. You may reach me at (202) 527-9709 or by email at bheath@usatoday.com.

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,

Brad Heath